Interview Transcript

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Interviewee: Sister Joan Henehan
Interviewer: Shannon Green, Director, CSJ Institute, Mount Saint Mary's University; Kelby Thwaits, Instructor, Film and Television, Mount Saint Mary's University.
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Transcribed By: Nancy Steinmann

[00:00:00.00] [Director's comments]

[00:01:29.06] INTERVIEWER: So if we could just get started by you sharing your full name and your age.

[00:01:34.21] SISTER JOAN HENEHAN: I'm Sister Joan Henehan. I'm seventy-nine years old.

[00:01:39.09] INTERVIEWER: Sister Joan, where did you grow up?

[00:01:41.11] SISTER JOAN HENEHAN: I was born in Chicago, but we moved when I was one to--California. We started in San Bernardino, but then we moved into San Diego, and so that's where I grew up--in a housing project in Linda Vista.

[00:02:00.03] INTERVIEWER: Tell us a little bit about your family.

[00:02:01.23] SISTER JOAN HENEHAN: I was the youngest of four girls. There would have been five if my oldest sister had lived. But--before, when we were in Chicago, my mother had two--her first two daughters. And Dolores--when Dolores was five my other and my aunt were taking her to a church bazaar, and she skipped ahead. And when she got to the corner waved at my mother, and my mother waved back, and Dolores thought that was permission to step off the curb. She was hit by a car and killed. Well, my mother already had my sister Kay--she was two, being babysit by my Dad that day. But then she had my sister Pat, then she had Mary, then she had me. I was the baby of four girls, but I was not spoiled at all. [smiles]. Never. [laughs].

[00:03:01.12] INTERVIEWER: Were you a very religious family?

[00:03:02.25] SISTER JOAN HENEHAN: Very religious. If my mother and dad had had their way we probably all would have been nuns. Um-hm. Very religious. My father used to--he was working nights when I was growing up, and my mother would go down on Friday on the bus to downtown San Diego to the cathedral where they would go to the Sorrowful Mother Novena. And every Friday--all my growing up years. And then my--we all went to Mass on Sunday. I think my father also went to visit Old Town, and went to Perpetual Adoration at times. And my mother was always saying the Rosary. [laughs]

[00:03:51.19] INTERVIEWER: Where did you first meet the Sisters of St. Joseph?

[00:03:54.01] SISTER JOAN HENEHAN: Well, that's an interesting question. Can I tell you before I met the Sisters of St. Joseph I went to the Holy Cross Sisters. I went to St. Didacus School from the third grade. And I knew from meeting those Sisters I wanted to be a Holy Cross Sister. So I stayed in that school. And it was supposed to go through high school, but they only got--the parish only got to build it up to the ninth grade. So when I finished high school I wanted scholarship to their boarding school. Since I was going to be a Holy Cross Sister, I wanted to get used to being away from home. So I got the scholarship, and I went to Woodland, California, near Sacramento. And I started my class there. I was there for about one month, then there was a fire drill. And we all got out onto the school grounds and looked over and saw there was a real fire. And I had come the farthest. So the Sisters had given me the only locker in the dormitory. And all the other lockers were in the hall. So the firemen knew about the other lockers, and they saved all those other girls' clothes. But they didn't know about mine. So I lost all my clothes, and could not go with all the boarders to the next school where they were being sent, which was St. Mary's of the Wasach in Salt Lake City, Utah. I had to go home and go to that snooty Academy of Our Lady of Peace, run by the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet, where my three older sisters had all gone. In fact, my sister Mary, right next to me in

age, was a senior that year. Now I was a sophomore. So I finished out the year, and Mary entered the Sisters of St. Joseph. So I figured God got the vocation from our family, and so I just went on with my life as if I wasn't going to be a Sister anymore. And then in my senior year, I was holding the door for one of the Sisters. And she said to me, "Joan, have you thought of what you're going to do after you graduate?" And I said, "Not really." And she said, "Well, I think you have a vocation." And I said, "Well, I'll pray about it." And as I told you, my father used to go to the Old Town to--for Perpetual Adoration. And I asked him if I could go with him, and ride down there. And I went over to the rectory and rang the doorbell to talk to a priest I did not know. And I told him my "symptoms", and he said, "Yes, I do think you're coming down with a vocation." [laughs]. And he said, "The only question is, what order?" And I said, "Oh! I've always wanted to be a Holy Cross Sister. My sister is a Sister of St. Joseph. And my--I didn't want to talk to my pastor; he'd want me to be a Benedictine." And he says, "Oh! You don't even have a question in that regard. All those orders have different rules. You don't want to confuse your parents by going into a different order from your sister." And I was seventeen years old at the time, and I said, "Oh! Okay." And so I went back home and I told my mother and my father, and they were thrilled. And so I applied and was accepted as a Sister of St. Joseph. And I entered September 15, 1955 at the age of eighteen. [laughs].

[00:07:47.28] INTERVIEWER: [Director's comments].

[00:08:03.04] SISTER JOAN HENEHAN: Now, I should say the last thing. When I tell my vocation story now, I say, "God burned down a school and gave my sister a temporary vocation in the Sisters of St. Joseph to get me here." Because she stayed in the community around twenty years, and then she had some difficulties so she left. And subsequently met and married a widower with nine children. So among my three married sisters I have twenty nieces and nephews. [laughs].

[00:08:40.27] INTERVIEWER: Wow!

[00:08:41.10] SISTER JOAN HENEHAN: Uh-huh.

[00:08:42.08] KELBY THWAITS: It's a little like the Sound of Music almost. [all laugh].

[00:08:47.18] INTERVIEWER: What were your impressions of the Sisters of St. Joseph as you got to know them, and how they maybe differed from the other Sisters?

[00:08:53.27] SISTER JOAN HENEHAN: Well, you know, actually there wasn't all that much difference. It was just that I had been--as an elementary school person--and the Sisters of Holy Cross were very good to us. We lived in a housing project. We were very, very poor. And I don't know if they didn't let us pay any tuition, or they just cut it down, but I know they gave us great care. So that's why I was so into them. But the Sisters of St. Joseph were just as good as the Sisters of the Holy Cross. And of course, when I was in high school, I didn't know what their charism was, I didn't know what--what differences they would have had. But I'm very happy. I've never been sorry that I entered the Sisters of St. Joseph.

[00:09:43.02] INTERVIEWER: Do you remember any of the Sisters from Our Lady of Peace? Any of the names, or any stories about specific Sisters?

[00:09:49.19] SISTER JOAN HENEHAN: At my age, I'm lucky to be able to remember some but not all. I do remember that Sister Robertine [unknown] was the Sister who said to me, "Joan, do you know what you're going to be doing after you graduate?" And I had had her in a class there. And I had actually taught at the Academy--one year. I was missioned there too. But I'm blocking now on what you had asked me--

[00:10:18.20] INTERVIEWER: If you remember specific Sisters from that time--

[00:10:20.20] SISTER JOAN HENEHAN: Oh, yes.

[00:10:22.25] INTERVIEWER: --or other stories like Sister Robertine.

[00:10:24.13] SISTER JOAN HENEHAN: Yes. Yes. I do but they're not coming to me this minute.

[00:10:32.22] INTERVIEWER: So tell us about what it was like to enter the community. What do you remember how you felt about those days?

[00:10:38.16] SISTER JOAN HENEHAN: It's funny that you should ask that question today, because one of our former members who lives in Arizona was coming here today, and she called ahead and told all of us who had entered with her on that same day--in 1955--if we could have lunch together here are the Carondelet Center. So we did--we met for lunch, and there are about--oh, I think there were about fifteen of us here. When we entered we were sixty-three. And of course, a number left, and some have died. But we are still a nice large group I think. And we had a lovely lunch. What I remember about them is how different we all were, you know. It's just amazing how--it says in Scripture that we are parts of the body and all the parts are different. Well we are the body of Christ and all the parts are different. So when we get together, those differences show up. And now we can appreciate them even more.

[00:11:54.07] INTERVIEWER: Do you remember receiving the habit?

[00:11:58.15] SISTER JOAN HENEHAN: Oh yes. [laughs].

[00:11:52.03] INTERVIEWER: What do you remember about that day?

[00:12:00.23] SISTER JOAN HENEHAN: [laughs]. I remember that my sister was a second year novice. She was being professed that day. And so--what I remember was that the Sisters who clothe you--you know, you go in in your black skirt and top, and then you come out and you change into the long gown--it was the formal habit--and the band across the forehead, and the "gimp" [gestures at front of body]--that plastic piece that was--. And I just remember feeling like this is the real change now. Now it's--totally done. Of course, I still had two years of novitiate left--until profession. But that was a very significant day. And our family came, and my other--my married--I had two married sisters at that time. And then my sister who was professed, and me getting the habit. It was quite a family day. [laughs].

[00:13:12.22] INTERVIEWER: What else about your time in the novitiate. Was there anything that surprised you, or that didn't meet your expectations, or went beyond your expectations during that time?

[00:13:22.27] SISTER JOAN HENEHAN: Well, I remember a big thing was silence. And we were not to speak at certain times at all. And--if we met in the hall we said, "Praise be to Jesus!", and the response was, "Amen!". And I did like that. I did like that very much. And the silence I don't think was too difficult. But that was probably the biggest difference in life. I also remember as a postulant, right when I first entered--we have such a gorgeous view here of the city of Los Angeles. And early on, as a postulant, I was--we were having some kind of a retreat, or maybe it was a Sunday evening something. But anyway I was standing outside looking at the lights of the city. And my sister who was a novice--we could not speak--she came and stepped over the thing and stood in front of me to block my view. Well that Sunday was visiting Sunday. So when our family came to us and we could then talk I said, "Mary, why did you stand in front of me the other night?" She said, "I thought that you were thinking of leaving." [laughs]. And I said, "I wasn't. I was just admiring the view!" [laughs].

[00:14:49.14] INTERVIEWER: Tell me a little bit about your education at that time. You started to--did you start to study at the Mount?

[00:14:55.04] SISTER JOAN HENEHAN: I did study at the Mount. And I was taking General Education, and so I majored in English. And I loved being at the Mount. And then, when it was time to get missioned, half of my reception--we call the "reception" the group that we entered with--we received the habit with--and so, half of my reception was sent out to practice teach. And I was sent to the Mount to stay and finish my degree. But then, when the mission list came out, I was missioned. And I had no practice teaching. I was missioned to St. Vincent's School [Los Angeles, California], and I was to teach the second grade. Now you're looking at somebody who had never taught the second grade. But the Sister who was in charge of that kind of thing at the time was Sister Martina [Pidge]. And she came to classes with me on the first three days, and taught me how to help them sit down, and how to keep them quiet--it was a good three days, and I learned a lot--and then from there, the rest is history. [laughs].

[00:16:15.13] INTERVIEWER: When you were studying at the Mount, do you remember some of the Sisters on faculty, and any stories or memories you'd like to share?

[00:16:25.12] SISTER JOAN HENEHAN: My memory isn't the greatest. But I know I loved all the Sisters that I had. And I loved the Sisters in the novitiate too. I loved--we had Sister Rose Cecilia [Harrington (1919-2003)] as a postulant mistress, and Mother Roseanne [??] as a novice mistress. And as for the college, I'm sure Sister--I'm not--because later I taught at the college, I can't remember who was there when I taught and who was there when I was studying earlier.

[00:17:03.15] INTERVIEWER: So you were an elementary school teacher for a number of years?

[00:17:05.26] SISTER JOAN HENEHAN: I was. As I say I started out in second grade, and the next year I was to teach the first grade. And I loved that too. And then I got changed. I was sent to open a new convent in Orinda, California near Oakland. And I taught the second grade there for two years, and then the fourth grade for two years, and then the sixth grade for two years. So I had two classes three times. And I taught music in the--well, choir in the eighth grade--sixth, seventh and eighth grade. And I did love that too. And I was there--I think I was there for seven years. And then I was missioned to the Academy of Our Lady of Peace--my alma mater! And I was there one year teaching English and Religion. And then I was--I got a really different thing--I was asked to teach at the Mount. And I taught--

[00:18:14.06] INTERVIEWER: Can I just stop you for a moment before we get to that part. You were teaching elementary school it looks like the early part of Vatican II.

[00:18:22.27] SISTER JOAN HENEHAN: Oh yes.

[00:18:23.23] INTERVIEWER: Can you talk about experiencing the Second Vatican Council while you were an elementary school teacher?

[00:18:28.22] SISTER JOAN HENEHAN: Yes, I can. [laughs]. I loved the Ecumenical Council. And even then--I had finished my degrees at the Mount, but I was taking summer classes at the University of San Francisco. I got a masters in Theology, and then I continued and got a masters in Spirituality. So during those summers, and--Vatican II had taken place. Well, one summer I was walking across the campus of USF with Sister Rose Cecilia [Harrington (1919-2003)] who had been my postulant mistress--but now here I am, a professed Sister. And a Jesuit novice came up to us. And he was the brother of one of our Sisters. His name is Father Robert Fabing, [SJ]-- Father Bob Fabing. And Sister Marcella Fabing is one of our Sisters--a year ahead of me in religious life. And he came up to us and said, "Sisters, when is your community going to change the habit?" And Sister Rose Cecilia said, "Well, Mr. Fabing, do you think we should?" And he said, "I certainly do! Women looking at you can say, 'Who would bother them? Nobody's going to bother them.' And the call to holiness is universal. So it's easy for them to be holy, because nobody is going to bother them. But if you look like other women, then it would be clearer that the call to holiness was for everyone." And you know that was the day I changed my mind. And then when our community started to experiment, my sister, who was then Sister Dolores Therese [Henehan]--she was asked to try one of the suits and wear it for a while, and then let people see how they felt about it. There were others--I think that we had four colors to go from, like tan, and blue, and grey, and maybe brown. And so then the community said those who wish can change. You can't go back and forth. But you can change or not change. So that's what we did. Uh-hm. And I think that was the biggest thing that happened for us, because it really did change the view of religious life for women. Uh-hm.

[00:20:57.15] INTERVIEWER: That's great. What about the call of going back to the roots of the community's foundations from Vatican II? Did that impact you at that time as well?

[00:21:08.05] SISTER JOAN HENEHAN: Well, it's impacted me for the rest of the time right up till the present--because I just went back to St. Louis. I was in St. Louis last week from Wednesday to Saturday having a meeting. But the--it was marvelous to do--to learn how those first women were so brave. They were absolutely courageous. And to learn about the spirit of our founder, the Jesuit, Father Jean Pierre Médaille [(1618-1689)], who started us, and what he was challenging these women to do and to be. And you--our charism is--we say, "Unity and reconciliation"--that all may be one. Nobody should be left out.

Everybody matters. And anything that separates us, we strive to reconcile. Well that's--you know, that's a matter for families to do, it's a matter for churches to do, it's a matter for politics to do--but it certainly is a matter for religious congregations to do. So it was wonderful. And then our community has been very generous about letting us go. I have been to our foundations, you know, even in France. So--

[00:22:28.27] INTERVIEWER: Can you share a little bit about that--what that meant to you?

[00:22:32.09] SISTER JOAN HENEHAN: Well it was some years back. And I guess I just want to remember that it was a matter--like your heart is there. Your heart is there. And to know that these brave women could start something out of nothing. And look how it grew. Yeah.

[00:23:00.00] INTERVIEWER: So after you had these years of study in Theology and Spirituality you were called to teach at the Mount?

[00:23:05.25] SISTER JOAN HENEHAN: I was. Uh-hm. And I--eventually I became the Chair of the Theology Department, which in this day and age is called "Religious Studies". And I did love that too. Uh-hm. And I taught at both campuses--the Chalon campus and the Doheny campus. And--oh--I forgot to tell you that--because I was doing Theology, I also started getting invitations from parishes and other places to give retreats. And so--I guess it was that that intrigued me--I forgot to say that. It was that that intrigued me to go back to USF and get my degree in Spirituality. Because I thought, "Why do they think I can give retreats just because I know Theology?" And so I finished another masters. And I'm so grateful that I did. I love retreat work. And I'm also a Spiritual Director. So people come to talk about deepening their relationship with God, and prayer forms, and things of that nature.

[00:24:14.25] INTERVIEWER: Is there a way that you would articulate the CSJ spirituality? The spirituality of the CSJ Sister?

[00:24:21.25] SISTER JOAN HENEHAN: Ah. Well for me, it is striving to accept everybody as they are--unity--and reconciliation--being forgiving, being welcoming. It's not that I'm always able to do it. Nobody's perfect. [laughs]. And I'm certainly not. But that would be it for me. And to let people realize how much a part of God they are. You know, each person is a creation of God--and to revere that. I--in fact, when I'm teaching, I often say, "You know if you baked a cake, and somebody came in and threw it on the floor, you'd be devastated, because it's your creation. Well, imagine how God feels when we do things that are really throwing people on the floor." And so--that's very important to me. And when I fail in it, I'm very sorry. Uh-hm. [smiles].

[00:25:30.20] INTERVIEWER: What were some of the favorite classes that--or subjects that you taught at the Mount--in Religion or Theology and Spirituality?

[00:25:36.10] SISTER JOAN HENEHAN: Oh, my goodness. Well Scripture--I taught a lot of Scripture classes. Both Old Testament and New Testament--or Hebrew Scriptures and Christian Scriptures. And I taught Spirituality classes, and I gave retreats. But I guess--I don't remember specific titles. You know, like I'm sure I had one on the Gospels, and the Epistles of Paul, and you know, things like that. But I don't remember a list because that was a long--time--ago. [laughs].

[00:26:14.24] INTERVIEWER: Is there something that you're most proud of at that time, of being a teacher at the Mount?

[00:26:21.06] SISTER JOAN HENEHAN: Probably that I was asked to go there. Um-hm. I loved being at the Mount, and I was there with Sister Magdalen Coughlin [(-1994), President MSMU, 1976-1989], and Sister Cecilia Louise Moore [(1928-2004), President MSMU 1967-1976]. Yes, we had wonderful presidents. And I'm thrilled that the--lay people who have been presidents have just been as exquisite as they were. We are just thrilled with Anne McElaney-Johnson [President MSMU 2011-present] as we were with--blocking on her name right now--

[00:26:54.21] INTERVIEWER: --Jackie--

[00:26:55.09] INTERVIEWER: Jackie Doud [Jacqueline Powers Doud, President MSMU 2000-2011]. Uh-huh, Jackie Doud.

[00:26:59.00] INTERVIEWER: Is there anything from the Sister presidents that you named that--anything you would want us to know about either of them, or a memory that you have of either of them?

[00:27:07.07] SISTER JOAN HENEHAN: Hm. Not so much of them, but I do remember that my next thing happened when Sister Mary Kevin Ford [(1939-2003), superior general, CSJs] was the congregational leader. And she came to California in January one year to visit the Sisters here. And she called me. And she said, "Sister dear, I thought you would be at the Mount today." And I said, "No Sister, we're on semester break." And she said, "Well, I wanted to talk to you." And I said, "Well, I could come." She said, "All right, Sister, I'll see you at ten o'clock tomorrow morning." So I came up the next day at ten o'clock, met her here at Carondelet Center, and she said, "Sister, we want to ask you to go to Hawaii to be the Vice-Provincial." And I said, "Oh, Sister, I'm embarrassed to tell you--I don't even know who the Provincial is there." And she said, "Well, you would be, because it's a vice-province!" [laughs]. And I said, "Oh." And she said, "I'll give you two weeks to think about it. I'll be in town for two weeks. Now I don't want you to talk about it with the Sisters, because if you should say 'No', you know, I don't want them to feel like they were second." And she said, "You can talk about it with your family--just so they know it's confidential." And I said I would let her know. So I called each of my three married sisters and told them that I had been asked if I would go there. And I didn't know what to say. And each one of my sisters said, "Oh, say yes! We'll come and visit you!" [laughs]. So in one week I was able--she was going to be here for two weeks--so in one week I was able to tell Sister Mary Kevin that I would say yes to going to Hawaii. So I went there. Oh, and what she said to me--this was the important thing about the question you had asked--she said to me, "And Sister I know you're here at the Mount doing what you're doing, you're chairing the department; but Sister Magdalen Coughlin--(who was then the president)--Sister Magdalen Coughlin will realize that the needs of the congregation are bigger than the needs of Mount St. Mary's College"--(at the time--"college"--and it's now "university"). So I was able to tell her yes and spent eight years--two terms--in Hawaii.

[00:29:50.24] INTERVIEWER: So what was it like to transition into that kind of leadership role in--had you been to Hawaii before?

[00:29:56.04] SISTER JOAN HENEHAN: Never. Never. But each of my sisters go there. [laughs]. It was probably harder for the Sisters than for me. Here I am, an outsider--and we were just talking last night at another meeting about the--culture of places. And the culture of Hawaii--now I wasn't up on the culture or anything like that. So it was probably harder for the Sisters to have a "newbie" come in and--but I loved my eight years there. And I made some pretty good friends. And the Sisters were wonderful. And I saw some hard things. Yeah, I saw a Sister die. And I saw a Sister enter, and now she is in leadership in Hawaii. Now that was years and years ago. I was there from [nineteen] eighty to eighty-eight.

[00:30:57.01] INTERVIEWER: What were some of the ministries in Hawaii that were vibrant at that time in the community?

[00:31:02.27] SISTER JOAN HENEHAN: Education, chiefly, I would say. And I also felt at the time that I wanted to do something that was beyond the congregation. So I started visiting women in prison. And I really enjoyed doing that. And so when I came back to the United States--I mean, pardon me--when I came back to California, I even have stayed in that ministry too--I volunteer at the women's jail in Lynwood on Sundays to do communion services. Uh-hm. [smiles].

[00:31:46.16] INTERVIEWER: That sounds like it's had a deep impact on you personally.

[00:31:48.22] SISTER JOAN HENEHAN: It has. It has. I--each time I go--I go twice a month, because it's hard to get away sometimes, but--I do communion services in two different units in the Lynwood facility. And I want the women to know they're not forgotten--they're not bad people. We all make mistakes. I say each time, "The Pope isn't perfect, bishops aren't perfect, priests aren't perfect, nuns aren't perfect, mothers aren't perfect, dad's aren't perfect, and children are certainly not perfect." [laughs]. So what we have to do is just what my novice mistress used to say, "Get up and start over again." Get up and start over again. Get up and start over again. And I do love that ministry. Uh-hm. [smiles].

[00:32:40.26] INTERVIEWER: Sounds like it goes right with the themes of unity and reconciliation.

[00:32:44.09] SISTER JOAN HENEHAN: It does! It does! Uh-hm. [smiles].

[00:32:48.04] INTERVIEWER: Are there other issues outside of your ministries of spirituality--like other social justice issues that you strongly connect with? Or are passionate about?

[00:32:56.27] SISTER JOAN HENEHAN: I'm passionate about women's rights. Yes. [laughs]. And also the poor. Yes. I try to keep dollars in my--you know how in the car you have a--little thing there. I try to keep dollar bills so that those people who stand by the roadside and need food--I always feel for them, and I feel so bad when I don't have a dollar. And then I hold my hands like this [clasped in prayer] letting them know I'll pray for them. And a lot of times they say, "God bless you!" and--uh-hm.

[00:33:34.03] INTERVIEWER: What about women's rights? Would you say more about that?

[00:33:36.14] SISTER JOAN HENEHAN: Well, I'm hoping that this woman will get elected president! [laughs]. But I don't think that women are a lower class, or less able and all of that. I think we have seen--in community we have seen so many fabulous women leaders. And not only in community, but in the world as well. So I just feel that women need to realize they are respectable and can accomplish things. Uh-hm.

[00:34:13.11] INTERVIEWER: Did you see that play with your students at the Mount? You know--developing them as women?

[00:34:20.04] SISTER JOAN HENEHAN: Oh I think so. I think yes, that the Mount--I do think they were developing women's skills--I do very much so. Yes.

[00:34:35.19] INTERVIEWER: So after Hawaii--

[00:34:40.00] SISTER JOAN HENEHAN: Oh yes. [laughs].

[00:34:41.01] INTERVIEWER: [laughs]. Such a rich history! You still have a few different ministries.

[00:34:49.09] SISTER JOAN HENEHAN: Uh-hm.

[00:34:49.27] INTERVIEWER: As--you worked in a parish.

[00:34:52.07] SISTER JOAN HENEHAN: Uh-hm.

[00:34:54.01] INTERVIEWER: And then also in Tucson--was that also a parish?

[00:34:58.13] SISTER JOAN HENEHAN: Uh-hm. I was Regional Superior in Arizona. And I did work in a parish and lived in a parish, yes. I do like parish work, too. You know, I've taught catechism classes and things of that nature years and years ago. But my main ministry in Arizona was being the Regional Superior. And do you know what that means?

[00:35:26.11] INTERVIEWER: Say more about that.

[00:35:27.19] SISTER JOAN HENEHAN: Okay. We don't have them anymore. But at that time, the province was so wide-spread--and it still is, you know--it goes up to Idaho and over to Arizona. So what we were doing was having someone in leadership, that the people in that area could contact for things that they might need, and not have to wait until it goes to headquarters. And so that's what I did. I did that in Arizona, and I also did it in--where?

[00:36:06.08] INTERVIEWER: You were in St. Louis [Missouri] for a time as well.

[00:36:11.29] SISTER JOAN HENEHAN: Oh, I was on the congregation leadership team. Uh-hm. I believe

that was 19--or 2003 to 2008. And I was on the congregation leadership team. We had a team of five. Sister Karen Kennelly, who used to be the president of Mount St. Mary's--now University [1989-2000]--and I was with her there at the Mount. But then she was the General Superior. And Sister Barbara Moore [Sister Barbara Anne Moore, originally Sister Anne Benedict, first African-American CSJ] from St. Louis was on it. And Sister--I'm blocking on names now, but I can see faces--anyway there were five of us. And we each had different liaisons. Like, my liaison group--I was the connecting person to Albany, New York. So I would go there to visit several times each of the years that I was on the team. And then--we also got to go--this was magnificent--you also got to go to the missions of the community. I've been to Peru--we had Chile--I've been--of course I'd been to Hawaii already--and--seeing the whole congregation in all its parts was wonderful--and Japan, I was in Japan. And so I relish those years and the experiences that I had too.

[00:37:43.24] INTERVIEWER: You have had a more unique experience in that sense across the congregation--

[00:37:49.10] SISTER JOAN HENEHAN: Uh-hm. [nods]

[00:37:49.28] INTERVIEWER: --in like the various ministries--places that you just mentioned. How do you reflect on where the congregation is going now, having had that broader experience outside the province?

[00:38:02.10] SISTER JOAN HENEHAN: I think that we are going through a big transformation right now, and we don't see where we're going. And there's a wonderful prayer that Thomas Merton [OCSO, (1915-1968)] used to pray. And it's Lord I don't know where I'm going, I don't know the way, but I trust that you're with me. And I can remember back in the years of the changes--there was a wonderful Sister, Bette Mosslander [Sisters of St. Joseph of Concordia, (1923-2015)]--most of the Sisters would remember her--and I was in leadership at the time, and she and I were commiserating about this. And she said something that I will never forget: "I am not worried," she said. "I just think God is doing something new." So I'm sticking with Bette Mosslander on that. [smiles]. I'm not worried. I think through our associates, we've seen that our charism isn't just belonging to the Sisters of St. Joseph. Other people share that charism. And our associates and our consociates and our Ohanas and our Familias de San Jose--they all participate in wanting the world to be one, and healing the hurts of the world. And so I'm with that.

[00:39:28.18] INTERVIEWER: Do you have any anxieties about the future?

[00:39:32.00] SISTER JOAN HENEHAN: At the age of seventy-nine, I think I'll probably be gone before much of the future gets done. [laughs]. So I'm not worried. And I trust in God who began it all--will bring it to completion, whatever it's to be.

[00:39:54.16] INTERVIEWER: Could you say a little more about how you've seen the charism come to light in the laity--where you observed that, or how that's changed over time?

[00:40:06.07] SISTER JOAN HENEHAN: I've seen--I also attend the associate meetings--there are different groups. And there's a group that meets where I used to live at the Villa. And so I stay with that group. And I am just amazed at what those women and men can do. You know, they want to bring about change--they want to bring about healing--and they're very prayerful people. So I'm just in awe of them, and I love them. [laughs].

[00:40:38.06] INTERVIEWER: What would you say you are most proud of as per the congregation as a whole? What makes you proud to be--part of this?

[00:40:44.06] SISTER JOAN HENEHAN: A Sisters of St. Joseph? I guess that we have [produred]. We keep going. We do keep getting up and starting over again, get up and start over again. We're trying--we're trying even to become more one as a congregation. And we don't see where that's going to go either. We don't know, but we're in the process of these retreats, where we're dialoging about it. How is it that we can be--just everybody is welcome. And everybody belongs.

[00:41:23.15] INTERVIEWER: What is it that brings you the most joy, as a Sister?

[00:41:28.16] SISTER JOAN HENEHAN: Hm. I don't know if this is an appropriate answer to the question of what brings me the greatest joy, but I am always delighted when I'm out--and I talk to everybody on the street. It's a pity how shy I am. But when I meet people I always say hello, and how are you, and that. And I'm delighted when they say, "Are you a Sister?" They can tell. And then I say, "How did you know?" And I'll never forget--one man said this to me--I said, "How did you know--the lack of makeup?" And he said, "No. You're friendlier than most people." And I thought that was the biggest compliment I have ever received.

[00:42:17.08] INTERVIEWER: Are there any other stories that--as you reviewed the information--or anything else that came to your mind that you want to share with us today?

[00:42:25.10] SISTER JOAN HENEHAN: Well, I'm very glad that I said yes, and that--even knowing when I told you my vocation story, and I say that God burned down a school and gave my sister a temporary vocation in this community to get me here--I have never been sorry that I have been here. This has been--and I've been through hardships. I've been through cancer. Uh-hm. When I was in Hawaii I had cancer. And it has never recurred--I had surgery and it has never recurred. [smiles]. And I think that it's just a--the whole idea of committing yourself to something, and being faithful to it. Husbands and wives do that all the time. And so we do too. You're faithful to the commitment that you made, and you try to get better and better at it. So I keep praying for that. And I do love the whole idea of our prayer life together.

[00:43:34.28] INTERVIEWER: And finally, are there any--I know I've asked you this a couple of times--but are there any other memories of other Sisters that maybe have already gone to God that you want to share?

[00:43:43.23] SISTER JOAN HENEHAN: Oh, I remember a long, long time ago I had a friend. And when we were in the novitiate, we were told you are not supposed to have particular friends. You know, because you didn't want to be exclusive. And there was a friend of mine--you know I'm even blocking out her name right now--but it might come to me. But she said to me one day, "Joan, I feel like you're distancing yourself from me." And I said, "I'm afraid you're not going to be here very long." And you know what, she was dying of cancer. I didn't know it at the time. But when I said that to here she said, "You're absolutely right. But we can be friends while I'm here." [smiles]. And I--as I say, I'm blocking out her name right now. And I'm sorry.

[00:44:45.22] INTERVIEWER: If you think of it, you can tell me later--

[00:44:47.13] SISTER JOAN HENEHAN: [laughs]. Okay. Thank you.

[00:44:50.01] INTERVIEWER: Any other stories or memories?

[00:44:51.29] SISTER JOAN HENEHAN: What was the question?

[00:44:54.10] INTERVIEWER: Just of other Sisters that may be--and could be of a Sister that can no longer speak for herself--just if there is somebody you want us to make sure that we remember also.

[00:45:02.24] SISTER JOAN HENEHAN: Oh.

[00:45:04.08] INTERVIEWER: Could be a friend who's still living but cannot, you know, share, or just a memory of someone who can--

[00:45:09.12] SISTER JOAN HENEHAN: Well Sister Suzanne Steffen [(1928-2016)] died recently. And she was somebody that I had been close to. And her brothers were absolutely marvelous to her. And she could not speak for the last couple of years. She couldn't get any words out at all. And so I would go up to her and I would say, " Suzanne, I love you. I know it's hard for you. But we love you anyway, and everything--you know--we know you're for us." Sometimes she'd be anxious, and--but oh, she was a Godsend. And I certainly miss her. And there have been so many. I'm sorry that I didn't ponder this more.

[00:46:06.05] INTERVIEWER: That's all right. You know--and we'll be--we'll be back you know on other days, and we'll be you know doing other kinds of shooting like during you know meals, and what they call the B-roll, that's extra. So in the future, if you think of someone, and you have a picture, you know we can tell another story another time too.

[00:46:22.22] SISTER JOAN HENEHAN: Oh. Okay.

[00:46:24.28] INTERVIEWER: Sometimes the interview brings out memories a little later.

[00:46:27.02] SISTER JOAN HENEHAN: I see.

[00:46:28.00] INTERVIEWER: And that's okay--you can hold onto them. And we can still---

[00:46:30.19] SISTER JOAN HENEHAN: But you didn't ask me about my ministry now.

[00:46:33.14] INTERVIEWER: Please tell me about your ministry now.

[00:46:34.22] SISTER JOAN HENEHAN: [laughs]. When I came back from St. Louis, I asked if I could be in pastoral care with our retired Sisters. And I love that ministry. I visit our Sisters room to room. And a couple of times a month sometimes I give presentations on spiritual topics. And I--it's just amazing to me. In fact, I did something this year that I'm very touched by. I am feeling the aging process now. And so I have selected some Sisters whom I really admire. And I've gone to them and said, "As I am entering this phase of life, I wonder if there's any advice you can give me?" And I have gotten some very helpful hints. You know, like, "Don't push the river"--allow it to just happen. And it's just very good. It's--I hope that I can be as accepting as some of the Sisters that I witness here. You know, it's hard. I give spiritual talks, and one of the things that I said in one of our presentations was, "Jesus said, unless you become as little children, you cannot enter the kingdom of Heaven." And when you are aging, you are going back to childhood. You're going back to the time when you were dependent on other people--you couldn't do things all by yourself. And that--it's a beautiful letting go. And that's the kind of thing I want to remember, that--and so for Sister to say just allow it, let it happen--that, I thought, really confirmed that idea of become as little children. And sometimes they are just lying in bed, can't even speak, but they know you love them. I love this ministry. I have really loved all my ministries--the teaching, on every level, and then the ministry of spirituality, and being a Spiritual Director, and retreats, and now this. I like that in my life.

[00:49:23.06] INTERVIEWER: It shows.

[00:49:22.03] SISTER JOAN HENEHAN: It shows.

[00:49:22.28] SISTER JOAN HENEHAN: [laughs]. Thank you.

[00:49:28.14] INTERVIEWER: Is there anything else you wanted to share that I haven't asked you about?

[00:49:32.01] SISTER JOAN HENEHAN: I don't think so--not that I can think of. Am I--

[00:49:36.03] INTERVIEWER: I'm just going to check with my--team here.

[00:49:39.04] KELBY THWAITS: So you served quite a bit with the student population. So late teens into early twenties, and a little beyond with Mount St. Mary's and as Chair of Religious Studies, or Theology, as it was prior named. And then you just spoke about advice that you had sought out. What advice can you give to the lay person from your experience through student population into adults--that maybe you could give throughout the years or used throughout your time. What would you offer to people to enrich their lives as advice, just as you've gotten some yourself lately in aging, what would you give to others from what you've learned?

[00:50:34.28] SISTER JOAN HENEHAN: I would say pay attention. Be aware. God speaks in so many ways. And just think of the interactions you've had with people. You know, somebody treats you rudely, then you be aware of that--that really hurt you, and so you never want to do that to anybody else. And if somebody treats you rudely, the next time you see her or him, you don't do anything rude to them, you give them more than they can ask or even imagine. [smiles]. And just that idea of noticing what's going on. There's a prayer that St. Ignatius [St. Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556), founder of Society of Jesus (Jesuit order)] used to say, is if you were only going to say one prayer a day, let it be the Examen [Daily Examen, prayer

technique]. And at night, to look back over your day and say, "Where did I feel close to God?" And then, "Where did I feel like I wasn't close to God? Maybe I went against what God might have wanted for me." And then to pray that the next day would be closer to God, and keep going. That's what I would say to people: notice. Don't be unaware. Because you know, sometimes I've been saying, "I'm seventy-nine, and I'm just learning this? I probably could have learned it fifty-two years ago!" [laughs].

[00:52:09.22] KELBY THWAITS: That's wonderful. Thank you. Thank you very much.

[00:52:10.15] SISTER JOAN HENEHAN: You're welcome. You're welcome.

[00:52:13.02] INTERVIEWER: [Director's comments].

[00:53:48:00] END OF INTERVIEW.

Interview Index

Interview Date: September 28, 2016
Interviewee: Sister Joan Henehan
Interviewer: Shannon Green, Director, CSJ Institute, Mount Saint Mary's University; Kelby Thwaits, Instructor, Film and Television, Mount Saint Mary's University.
Location: [Carondelet Center?]
Transcription Date: 11/01/2016
Transcribed By: Nancy Steinmann

[00:00:00.00] [Director's Comments].

[00:01:28.20] INTRODUCTION: Full name and age. Sister Joan HenEhan, seventy-nine years old.

[00:01:39.04] : Early life. Born in Chicago, Illinois. Moved at age 1 to California. First lived San Bernardino. Grew up in housing project near Linda Vista, San Diego, California.

[00:02:00.09]: Family. Youngest of four girls. Oldest sister Dolores died age five, pedestrian accident. Other sisters in order Kay, Pat, Mary, and Joan. Very religious family. Father worked nights. Sorrowful Mother Novena, Perpetual Adoration services.

[00:03:52.03]: First meeting with Sisters of St. Joseph. Attended St. Didicus School from third grade. First considered Holy Cross Sisters. Obtained scholarship to Holy Cross Sisters boarding school in Woodland, California near Sacramento. Fire at school. Lost all clothes, so couldn't attend St. Mary's of the Wasach in Salt Lake City, Utah with other boarders. Attended "snooty" Academy of Our Lady of Peace run by CSJs which three older sisters attended. In senior year decided had a vocation. Advice from priest. Entered September 15, 1955 at 18.

[00:07:49.12]: [Director's comments].

[00:08:02.23]: More vocation story. Sister left CSJs and married. All three sisters married. Twenty nieces and nephews.

[00:08:47.20] Impressions of CSJs. Comparison with Sisters of Holy Cross. No idea of CSJ charism.

[00:09:43.10] Remembering Sisters from Our Lady of Peace. Sister Robertine [unknown]. Teaching at Our Lady of Peace Academy.

[00:10:32.29] Entering community. Lunch with fifteen sisters (of original 63) who joined at same time. All candidates different. Scripture: Parts of the body, and all the parts are different.

[00:11:56.01] Receiving the formal habit. Being clothed by other Sisters.

[00:13:12.22] Novitiate. Rule of silence. Story of sister thinking she wanted to leave community.

[00:14:47.15] Education and studying at the Mount. Major in English. Missioned to Mount to finish degree, then to St. Vincent's School, Los Angeles to teach second grade, with no teaching experience. Teacher training from Sister Martina [Pidge].

[00:16:16.14] Sisters at the Mount. In novitiate, Sister Rose Cecilia [Harrington (1919-2003)] postulant mistress. Mother Roseanne [??] novice mistress.

[00:16:59.28] Teaching first and second grade. Opening convent in Orinda, California near Oakland. Taught second, fourth, sixth grade there. Taught choir. There seven years. Mission to Academy of Our Lady of Peace, her alma mater. Taught 1 year, English and Religion.

[00:18:18.08] Vatican II. Taking summer classes at University of San Francisco at that time. Masters in Theology, masters in Spirituality. Sister Rose Cecilia [Harrington (1919-2003)]. Father Robert Fabing, SJ.

Brother of Sister Marcella Fabing, CSJ. Changing the habit--call to holiness for everyone. Sister Dolores Therese Henehan (sister) wearing suit as habit.

[00:20:56.20] Vatican II call to go back to roots of community. Bravery of first Sisters. Father Jean Pierre Médaille [(1618-1689)]. Charism-unity and reconciliation. Ability to travel to other communities.

[00:23:00.07] Teaching at the Mount. Chair of Theology Department (Religious Studies). Invitation from parishes to do retreats inspiration for MA degree in Spirituality. Spiritual Director.

[00:24:14.29] CSJ spirituality. Unity--striving to accept everybody as they are. Reconciliation--being forgiving, welcoming. Everyone a part of God. Example of baking a cake then throwing it on the floor.

[00:25:30.14] Favorite subjects taught at Mount. Scripture classes. Spirituality classes. Retreats. Gospels. Epistles of Paul.

[00:26:15.08] Things most proud of teaching at Mount. Ability to teach there. Sister Magdalen Coughlin [(-1994)]. Sister Cecilia Louise Moore [(1928-2004)]. Lay presidents of college--Anne McElaney-Johnson, Jacqueline Doud.

[00:27:20.04] Sister Mary Kevin Ford [(1939-2003), superior general, CSJs]. Invitation to go to Hawaii to be vice-provincial. Eight years in Hawaii--1980-1988. Transitioning to leadership role in Hawaii. Hawaiian culture.

[00:30:57.07] Ministries in Hawaii. Education. Visiting women in prison. Continuing in that ministry in Lynwood, California. Forgiving mistakes.

[00:32:49.15] Other social justice issues passionate about. Women's rights. Poor. Giving dollar bills to people begging for food. Hoping that woman [Hilary Clinton] will be elected U.S. president in 2016. Womens' equality and leadership. Play at Mount--developing women as leaders.

[00:34:38.20] Parish ministry. Regional superior in Arizona. Parish work in Tucson, Arizona. Teaching catechism classes. Description of obsolete regional superior position. Congregational leadership team in St. Louis, Missouri (2003-2008)--general superior Sister Karen Kennelly (former Mount president); Sister Barbara Moore; five in total. Liaison group to Albany, New York. Visiting community missions--Peru, Chile, Hawaii, Japan.

[00:37:45.06] Reflections on present congregations. Transformation. Prayer by Thomas Merton-"Lord I don't know where I'm going". Sister Bette Mosslander [Sisters of St. Joseph of Concordia, (1923-2015)]--"God is doing something new." Charism shared by others--associates, consociates, Ohanas, Familias de San Jose. Anxieties about the future.

[00:39:54.19] Charism in laity.

[00:40:38.21] Pride in Sisters of St. Joseph. "Produre"--persevere. Increasing unity.

[00:41:24.21] Greatest joy as a Sister. Strangers guessing she's a Sister. Friendliness.

[00:42:17.06] Other stories or memories. Experiencing cancer. Committing one's self and being faithful.

[00:43:35.03] Memories of other Sisters. In novitiate, told not to have particular friends. Fellow Sister dying of cancer. Sister Suzanne Steffen [(1928-2016)], close friend, couldn't speak in last years of life. [Director's comments].

[00:46:31.20] Current ministry. Pastoral care with retired Sisters. Presentation on spiritual topics. Asking other Sisters advice on aging. "Don't push the river." Acceptance of aging. Becoming "as little children" to enter heaven--age is going back to childhood.

[00:49:28.08] Advice to lay person teaching young adults. Pay attention--be aware how others feel. St. Ignatius--Daily Examen (prayer technique).

[00:52:12.06] [Director's comments].

[00:53:48.08] END OF INTERVIEW.